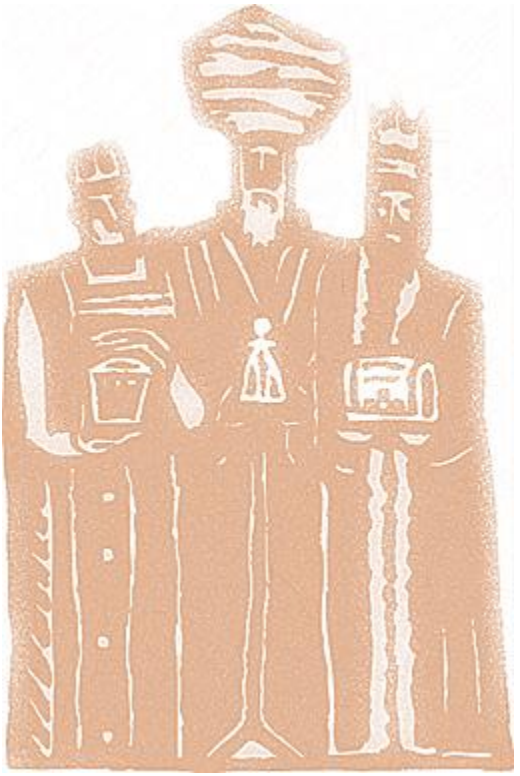
Nativity Scene Narratives

Part IV

Outsiders: The Magi



"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."
—Matthew 2:2 (NASB)

Valley Grace Brethren Church of Armagh, PA
December 25th, AD 2022

The LORD'S Day

The Twenty-fifth Day of December, *in the Year of our Lord* 2022

Christmas Day

Welcome to the worship services of Valley Grace Brethren Church!

Morning Worship—10:00 AM.

Call to Worship:* *"Go, Tell it on the Mountain"* (#127: chorus only).

Invocation.*

Hymn: *"The First Noel"* (#120; vv. 1, 3, 4, 5).

Prayer for Tithes & Offerings.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-12.

Prayer, Praises, & Testimony.

Hymn: *"We Three Kings* (#134)."

Announcemnts.

Hymn: *"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"* (#123).

Dismissal of Youth for Children's Church.

Greeting One Another.

Message: *"Nativity Scene Narratives: Outsiders—The Magi."*

Closing Hymn:* *"What Child is This?" (#126).*

Benediction.*

The Congregation will please arise, if able.

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Also check out our YouTube Channel (search "Terry Reese")!

Week of Dec. 18 - Dec. 23
Sunday School—6; Morning Worship—15
Midweek Prayer—4; Church Offering—$883.00

Wednesday Prayer & Bible Study—6:30 PM.

We continue our studies on Belshazzar's Feast of Folly (**Dan. 5**).

Today's Verse for Reflection:

"It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."—Isa. 49:6 (NASB)

"Star of Wonder, Star of Night..."

by Pastor Terry Reese; Valley GBC of Armagh, PA; 12/23/22)

Many theories have been advanced for years by various individuals to explain the phenomenon of the Star of Bethlehem. Some have suggested that it was a comet or meteor, or perhaps a conjunction of several planets (e.g., Jupiter & Saturn, or Jupiter & Venus)—or maybe even a distant *supernova* (i.e., an exploding star—an idea explored in Arthur C. Clarke's fictional story *The Star*). However, aside from the fact that no recorded natural phenomenon precisely fits the bill, it seems most doubtful that any conventional stellar body could do what this "star" does in Matt. 2:9: namely, **1)** move *south* (normal astronomical bodies have the appearance of "moving" east-to-west in the sky, due to the Earth's rotation), and **2)** lead people to a *specific house!* Perhaps it is best to see this anomaly for what it truly is: a specially-created miracle and manifestation of Divine Glory which guided the Magi in much the same way that the Shekinah Glory of God—taking the form of a Pillar of Cloud by Day and a Pillar of Fire by Night—guided the Israelites for 40 years in their wilderness journeys (Ex. 13:21-22)!

"So... you think you know all about the Magi, eh?"

Thoughts about 3(?) of the best-known/least-known Nativity figures

by Pastor Terry Reese; Valley GBC of Armagh, PA; 12/23/22)

The familiar Magi… those three beloved figures so prominent within every Nativity Scene and annual Christmas Pageant, whose traditions are faithfully related unto us through John Henry Hopkins, Jr.'s immortal carol, *We Three Kings of Orient Are* (1857). Yes, all of us know everything there *is* to know about the Wise Men… *OR DO WE*?

In truth, many of the "facts" that many profess to "know" concerning the Magi are not Scripturally derived at all, but instead, originate from later fanciful and highly questionable traditions. For example:

The Number of the Magi: *"Three?"* Perhaps not. In point of fact, the Bible *never explicitly states* how many Magi there were; only that there was a *plurality*. Perhaps the fact that *3 gifts* are specified (Matt. 2:11) has engendered the traditional *inference* that there were precisely *3 men.*

Their Names: The names Melchior, Balthasar, & Caspar are *traditional*, as opposed to *biblical*. So too, are such colorful and fanciful notions that they came, respectively, from India, Egypt, & Greece, or that they were baptized years later by St. Thomas, died as martyrs, and that their bones (which are now allegedly housed at Cologne) were later found by St. Helena, who then deposited them at the Hagia Sophia at Constantinople.

Their Place of Origin, and the Precise Nature of their Identity: Certain ancient sources tell us that they came from Persia—but other sources claim that their place of origin was Chaldea. While the priestly caste of Persia were known as *magi*, so too were various classes of magicians (cf. Acts 13:6). The Bible simply tells us that they were *"magi from the east."* The idea that the Magi were ***kings*** is NOT Scriptural—though the germ of this tradition might be traced to such passages as Ps. 72:10-11 & Isa. 60:1-6—which speak of Gentile rulers worshipping and paying tribute to the Messiah during the future Millennial Kingdom. The Magi indeed *foreshadow* this coming glorious reality!

What we *do* know. We know that they were Gentile outsiders who, by virtue of their actions, were indeed *wise men* (in contrast to the political & religious establishment of ancient Judea, who were either hostile or indifferent to Christ). They were consistently obedient to Divine revelation, they recognized Jesus' worth (Matt. 2:2, 11), and they obeyed God rather than man (Matt. 2:8, 12). Ultimately, they fulfilled the chief end of Man—they *worshipped Him!*